



United States Department of the Interior



BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

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Cosumnes River Preserve Cougar Unit and Silverado Unit Turkey Hunt (CA-180-14-10) Finding of No Significant Impact March 2014

It is my determination that this decision will not result in significant impacts to the quality of the human environment. Anticipated impacts are within the range of impacts addressed in the Sierra Resource Management Plan/Final Environmental Impact Statement. The proposed action does not constitute a major federal action having a significant effect on the human environment; therefore, an environmental impact statement is not necessary and will not be prepared. This conclusion is based on my consideration of CEQ's following criteria for significance (40 CFR §1508.27), regarding the context and intensity of the impacts described in the EA, and based on my understanding of the action:

- 1) *Impacts can be both beneficial and adverse and a significant effect may exist regardless of the perceived balance of effects.* The proposed Cougar Unit and Silverado Unit Turkey Hunt result in positive benefits by increasing the number of available hunt days for historically underrepresented members of the hunting public. No significant impacts to sensitive species, valley oak riparian forest, floodplain habitat and their associative wildlife species would occur over the long term.
- 2) *The degree of the impact on public health or safety.* No aspects of the proposed action have been identified as having the potential to significantly and adversely impact public health or safety. The proposed action would occur in a remote area of the preserve that is already actively hunted during the waterfowl season.
- 3) *Unique characteristics of the geographic area.* The project area does contain ACEC values. These values would not be negatively impacted by the proposed action. No aspect of the proposed action requires any earth to be moved, roads or paths to be constructed, or makes any physical changes to the action area. The Cougar Unit is already an actively hunted parcel during the waterfowl season and the Silverado Unit, though a newly incorporated parcel for this proposed action, would be protected by the project design features described in Section 2.2 of the Environmental Assessment (EA).
- 4) *The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial effects.* No anticipated effects have been identified that are scientifically controversial. As a factor for determining within the meaning of 40 C.F.R. § 1508.27(b)(4) whether or not to prepare a detailed environmental impact statement, "controversy" is not equated with "the existence of opposition to a use." *Northwest Environmental Defense Center v. Bonneville Power Administration*, 117 F.3d 1520, 1536 (9th Cir. 1997). "The term 'highly controversial' refers to instances in which 'a substantial dispute exists as to the size, nature, or

effect of the major federal action rather than the mere existence of opposition to a use.”” *Hells Canyon Preservation Council v. Jacoby*, 9 F.Supp.2d 1216, 1242 (D. Or. 1998).

- 5) *The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are likely to be highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.* The analysis does not show that this action would involve any unique or unknown risks.
- 6) *The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.* Providing recreational opportunities in the form of hunt days during the legal season is not precedent setting. The BLM established the Hunting Program at the Cosumnes River Preserve in 2008 and the proposed action is an implementation of an action set forth in that program.
- 7) *Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.* No negative significant cumulative impacts have been identified. The proposed action is consistent with the actions and impacts anticipated in the Sierra Resource Management Plan and its associated environmental impact statement. The actions are also consistent with the Cosumnes River Preserve’s March 2008 Final Management Plan.
- 8) *The degree to which the action may adversely affect National Historic Register listed or eligible to be listed sites or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural or historical resources.* The proposed action will not affect cultural resources listed on or eligible for the National Register of Historic Places and would not cause the loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural or historical resources.
- 9) *The degree to which the action may adversely affect ESA listed species or critical habitat.* No ESA listed species (or their habitat) will be adversely affected by the proposed action. The Project Design Features in Section 2.2 of the EA have addressed any potential interactions that may occur in the action area to ensure no adverse effects ESA listed species or critical habitat.
- 10) *Whether the action threatens a violation of environmental protection law or requirements.* There is no indication that the decision to move forward with the proposed action would result in actions that will threaten such a violation.

William S. Haigh
Field Manager, Mother Lode Field Office

Date



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EA Number: CA-180-14-10

Proposed Action: Cosumnes River Preserve Cougar Unit and Silverado Unit Turkey Hunt 2014

Location:

The proposed action area is located within the Cosumnes River Preserve (Preserve), which lies between the cities of Elk Grove and Galt, in southeastern Sacramento County, California (Figure 1). The Preserve stretches along the Cosumnes River from its confluence with the Mokelumne River near I-5 and the San Joaquin County line, extending up river past Highway 99 and Dillard Road towards the town of Wilton, California. The Preserve also includes Staten Island (in San Joaquin County), the McCormack-Williamson Tract, along with several private farms and ranches that are protected under conservation easement.

The proposed action area is the BLM's Cougar and Silverado Units which are located four miles west of Galt, California on Orr Road. The site is located within the E ½ of section 26 and the NW ¼ of the NW ¼ of section 25 T 5 N, R 5 E, of the MDM on the 7.5-minute Bruceville, CA USGS quadrangle. The latitude and longitude of the approximate center of the proposed action area are 38°15'24.97" North and 121°23'48.94" West (Figure 2).

1.0 Purpose of and Need for Action

1.1 Need for Action

The U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is one of seven land-owning partners at the 50,000-acre Cosumnes River Preserve (Preserve). The Preserve is a collaborative partnership between federal, state and local agencies, as well as non-profit conservation organizations and private farming and ranching cooperators. In 2008 the BLM, in coordination with California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), implemented a three-year pilot program to hunt wild turkeys (*Meleagris gallopavo*) in the spring of each year (late March to early May) on CDFW-owned Preserve lands. The Preserve's turkey hunt was primarily designed to provide additional recreational opportunities to historically under-represented members of the hunting public including, women, apprentice, and mobility impaired hunters. The secondary objective of the turkey hunt was to cut down on illegal trespass poaching. By opening a turkey hunt on the Preserve, illegal trespassers were afforded less opportunities to poach turkeys in the presence of legal hunters and check station operators that had immediate access to game wardens and federal law enforcement personnel. The new turkey hunting opportunity also furthered the mission of the BLM's multiple use mandates while also furthering the mission of the CDFW to provide accessible hunting opportunities for all persons within the State of California.

In 2012, following three years of successful turkey hunts on two parcels owned by CDFW, the Preserve partners developed a formal Cosumnes River Preserve Hunting Program (Hunting Program). The Preserve's Hunting Program tiers to the Preserve's March 2008 Final Management Plan, where the Preserve partners agreed that hunting was a compatible use of some Preserve lands provided that it did not interfere with the primary purpose of the Preserve to protect, restore and manage native habitats and species.

The purpose of the proposed action is to continue to provide additional recreational opportunities to the public by expanding the spring turkey hunting opportunities onto the BLM-owned Cougar and Silverado Units (Figure 2). As wild turkeys are quite numerous on Preserve lands, this action also provides the Preserve with another wildlife management tool.

1.2 Conformance with Applicable Land Use Plans

The proposed action is consistent with the BLM's February 2008 Sierra Resource Management Plan and Record of Decision where it states that the goal of the recreation program is to ensure the continued availability of outdoor recreational opportunities while protecting other resources and uses. The proposed action is also consistent with the March 2008 Cosumnes River Preserve Final Management Plan and the Cosumnes River Preserve Hunting Program.

2.0 Proposed Action and Alternatives

2.1 Proposed Action

The proposed action would incorporate the BLM-owned Cougar and Silverado Units of the Cosumnes River Preserve as newly hunted parcels during the annual spring turkey season. The hunts would be administered by CDFW with assistance from BLM employees as check station operators during the designated hunt dates.

The proposed action area is the Preserve's Cougar and Silverado Units (Figure 2). These two Units are owned by the BLM and access is provided via Orr Road and a BLM access easement located on the south side of the McFarland Ranch property (Figure 2). The BLM access easement is shared by a private landowner who maintains an electronic gate at the entrance to the driveway just south and west of the McFarland Ranch House.

The designated hunter check station for the Cougar and Silverado Units would be located at the Preserve's McFarland Ranch Unit located off of Orr Road. This is the same location that has been used for the past few years to administer the spring turkey hunts on the CDFW-owned McFarland Ranch/South Moyer Unit. (Figure 2). The site has the existing infrastructure such as gravel roads, parking lots, and restroom facilities to adequately support the proposed action.

Specific guidelines for the spring turkey hunt are developed annually by the CDFW, including the hunter draw and selection process. All instructions, legal requirements, and safety precautions, as described in the guidelines set forth by CDFW, would be followed by the selected hunting parties during each designated hunt day.

The check station operators would meet the selected hunters at the check station prior to the start of each designated hunt day. Check station operators would remain on site throughout the designated hunt days and times to ensure that all hunters returned safely to the hunter check station.

Upon arrival at the hunter check station, the station operator would ensure that each hunter is at the correct hunting location on the correct hunt day, has a valid hunting license and upland game bird

stamp, has a completed and signed CDFW liability release form, has appropriate hunting equipment, and has any other required or necessary equipment or information prior to leaving the check station for the designated hunting area. The check station operator would also ensure that each hunter thoroughly understands all safety and emergency procedures prior to leaving the check station area for the designated hunting area.

The check station operator would escort or direct each hunting party that has been assigned to the Cougar and Silverado Units to the established parking area at the Cougar Unit, just beyond the “Cougar Wetland Unit” sign at the entrance to the Cougar Unit. Hunters would be required to leave their vehicle at the Cougar Unit parking area and proceed on foot to their preferred hunting locations within the Cougar and Silverado Units.

Upon a hunter’s return to the check station from the designated hunting area, the check station operator would verify that all weapons are safely unloaded prior to entering the check station location. The check station operator would record hunter harvest information per CDFW instructions, take photographs for the record, and escort each hunter and/or hunting party off of Preserve lands and back onto the County road.

The proposed action and project design features in this EA would continue until the completion of the spring 2018 turkey hunting season as established by the state of California. At this time, a fresh NEPA document will be needed as well as supporting biological and cultural resource studies. In the meantime, if any substantial changes to the methods and location of the hunt described in this EA (and allowed under the SRUP) are proposed, the BLM will need to make a new decision. The BLM decision-making process will require either a fresh NEPA document or Determination of NEPA Adequacy (DNA) analysis along with supporting biological and cultural resource studies. Changing the location of hunt/project area, constructing new access roads/facilities for the program, any proposed surface disturbance, etc. would require reauthorization and a fresh NEPA document or DNA with supporting biological and cultural studies.

2.2 Project Design Features

- No other species of plant, fish or wildlife would be collected, harassed, killed, injured, or otherwise disturbed during the spring turkey hunts. All hunters would receive specific instructions to avoid other wildlife, in particular state and federally listed species such as giant garter snakes (*Thamnophis gigas*) and Swainson’s hawk (*Buteo swainsonii*). Although these two species have never been officially or anecdotally documented (*i.e.*, nesting Swainson’s hawks) on the Cougar or Silverado Units, there is suitable habitat so they do have the potential to occur on or near the Units.
- Check station operators would ensure that any illegal activity on the part of a hunter (*e.g.*, illegal harvest, harassment of protected species, *etc.*) would be reported to law enforcement personnel immediately.
- At the conclusion of each hunt day, participants would be required to remove all shell casings, decoys, supplies, and any trash or other items that they brought into the hunting area. Check station operators would ensure that hunters did not destroy any BLM or Preserve-owned property and that they did not collect any naturally occurring items (*e.g.*, feathers, antlers, rocks, plants, artifacts, *etc.*).
- To reduce the chance of lead contamination in the wetland and riparian areas of the Cougar and Silverado Units, the selected turkey hunters will be required to use non-lead ammunition for this hunt.

Site Preparation

No site preparation is needed for the proposed action. The check station and hunter parking lots are located in pre-existing, graveled or hardened parking areas. Routes to and from the parking areas are established and regularly travelled gravel or asphalt roads. No new roads, trails, parking lots, or other man-made features or objects would be created, modified or enhanced under the proposed action. No soil or other naturally occurring material will be disturbed or removed. The designated parking areas would be used only on designated hunt days by a limited number of participating hunters (*e.g.*, 2 hunters per day for 5-7 hunt days per year).

2.3 No Action

Under the no action alternative, the BLM would not expand the spring turkey hunting opportunities to the BLM-owned Cougar and Silverado Units of the Preserve. Women, apprentice and mobility-impaired hunters would not be allowed to recreate on BLM land under the no action alternative and the BLM would fail to meet part of its multi-use mandate.

2.4 Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Analysis

The BLM did not consider any other alternatives in detailed analysis.

3.0 Affected Environment

This section describes the physical, biological, social, and economic resources in the action area and the potential environmental effects of the no action and the proposed action alternatives. When necessary, mitigation measures are also proposed to avoid or reduce any effects to less than significant.

The following critical elements have been considered in this environmental assessment, and unless specifically mentioned later in this EA, have been determined to be unaffected by the proposed action: prime/unique farmlands, wild and scenic rivers, wilderness, traffic, climate and change, and environmental justice.

Areas of Critical Environmental Concern

Area of Critical of Environmental Concern (ACEC) are special management areas designated by the BLM to protect significant historic, cultural, or scenic values; fish and wildlife resources; natural process or systems; and/or natural hazards that:

- have more than locally significant qualities which give it special worth, consequence, meaning, distinctiveness, or cause for concern, especially compared to any similar resource;
- have qualities or circumstances that make it fragile, sensitive, rare, irreplaceable, exemplary, unique, endangered, threatened, or vulnerable to adverse change;
- has been recognized as warranting protection in order to satisfy national priority concerns or to carry out the mandates of Federal Land Management and Practices Act (FLMPA);
- has qualities which warrant highlighting in order to satisfy public or management concerns about safety and public welfare; and/or
- poses a significant threat to human life and safety or to property.

The proposed action area falls within the 2,035-acre Cosumnes River Preserve ACEC. Relevant and important values include the existence or potential for restoration of (1) valley oak (*Quercus lobata*) riparian forest; (2) seasonal wetlands; (3) oak (*Quercus spp.*) savannah; (4) agricultural lands that provide habitat for sandhill cranes (*Grus canadensis*) and a buffer for the Preserve.

Noise:

The Cougar and Silverado Units are in a remote area of the Preserve with no public access and only one nearby residence. The existing background noise level is limited to local traffic on Orr and New Hope Roads, agricultural noise from adjacent vineyard and ranching operations, and occasional shotgun blasts during the designated waterfowl hunts on the Cougar Unit (described in a separate EA for the Cougar Unit) and the publicly accessible Cosumnes River and sloughs.

Vegetation and Wildlife

Vegetation:

The wetland portion of the Cougar Unit is dominated by tule (*Schoenoplectus spp.*), cattails (*Typha spp.*), and other wetland species. Monocultures of the non-native, yellow water primrose (*Ludwigia hexapetala*) have become established near the eastern portions of the southern-most pond. Trees and shrubs in the riparian forest include valley oak (*Quercus lobata*) box elder (*Acer negundo*), Fremont cottonwood (*Populus fremontii*), button willow (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*), and poison oak (*Toxicodendron diversilobum*). The riparian understory is dominated by Himalayan blackberry (*Rubus armeniacus*) which, due to its density, tends to allow only minimal herbaceous growth on the ground layer. On the drier eastern property edge, isolated Oregon ash forms a sparse midstory, with a vigorous understory of redstem dogwood (*Cornus sericea*), California rose (*Rosa californica*). The ground layer contains significant stands of creeping wild rye (*Elymus triticoides*), a native perennial grass.

The Silverado Unit is dominated by restored native grasses including purple needlegrass (*Stipa pulchra*), creeping wild rye, and blue wild rye (*Elymus glaucus*). The perennial floodplain lakes/lagoons within the Silverado unit contain limited vegetation including tule, cattails, and highly invasive yellow water primrose.

Wildlife:

Many of the species that commonly occur at the Cougar Unit are not specifically managed for as part of the Preserve's overall management strategy. However, these species benefit from habitat that is created, restored or preserved as part of the Preserve's projects and continued management. These species include black tailed deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*), river otter (*Lutra canadensis*), California vole (*Microtus californicus*), beaver (*Castor canadensis*), western fence lizard (*Sceloporus occidentalis*), common kingsnake (*Lampropeltis getulus*), and muskrat (*Ondatra zibethica*), and several species of waterfowl, waterbirds, and passerines.

Migratory Birds:

Migratory birds and their habitats are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA), as amended (16 U.S.C 703 *et seq.*) Several migratory birds, including waterfowl, shorebirds, song birds, hummingbirds, vultures, and raptors are commonly found around the Cougar and Silverado Units. Songbirds, in particular, have the potential to utilize tree and shrub habitat located within the action area.

Special Status Species:

Certain special-status species and their habitats are protected by Federal, State, and local laws and agency regulations. The Federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973, as amended (16 U.S.C § 1531 *et seq.*) provides legal protection for plant and animal species in danger of extinction. This act is administered by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries). The plant and animal species protected under the ESA are listed as endangered, threatened, or, in the case of plants, rare.

In addition to formal lists of endangered and threatened species, the BLM maintains a list of taxa that are BLM designated Sensitive Species. Species of special concern are not afforded the same legal protection as listed species, but may be added to official lists in the future. The two general categories of special interest species include species that are candidates for listing as threatened or endangered, and species that are not candidates for listing, but have been unofficially identified as species of special interest by private conservation organizations or local government agencies.

Special-status species are those that meet any of the following criteria:

- Listed or candidate for listing under ESA.
- Plants or animals designated by the BLM as Sensitive Species.
- Nesting bird species and active nests of birds listed under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.
- Species of concern that have the potential to occur in the action area due to suitable or marginal habitat existence for those species, as identified by USFWS.

Each species on the list was evaluated for its potential to occur within the action areas. Species that are not found in the land cover types present in the action area, or whose known range falls outside the action area were eliminated from further consideration. Those special-status species that are known to occur or have the potential to occur within the action area were further evaluated in this document.

Special Status Vegetation:

No special-status plant species are known to occur in the proposed action area.

Special Status Wildlife:

Five special-status wildlife species were identified as having the potential to occur, or are known to occur, in the proposed action area (Table 1).

Table 1 Special Status Species

Common Name	Scientific Name	Known Occurrence	USFWS/NOAA Fisheries	BLM SENSITIVE SPECIES LIST
		or Potential to Occur		
Valley Longhorn Elderberry Beetle	<i>Desmocerus californicus dimorphus</i>	Elderberry shrubs are typically common in riparian habitat; however, there are none on the Cougar Unit or Silverado Unit.	Threatened	
Tricolored Blackbird	<i>Agelaius tricolor</i>	Known to historically nest on the Preserve. Currently they are migratory only; TCB do not occur within the proposed action area due to a lack of suitable breeding, feeding or sheltering habitat.		Sensitive Species
Swainson's Hawk	<i>Buteo swainsoni</i>	Known to occur seasonally in and around the action area.		Sensitive Species
Greater Sandhill Crane	<i>Grus canadensis tabida</i>	Known to occur during the winter/wet season and have been documented within the action area.		Sensitive Species
Giant Garter Snake	<i>Thamnophis gigas</i>	Known to occur on the Preserve, however the closest occurrence is ~5 miles from the Cougar and Silverado Units.	Threatened	

Recreation:

The BLM manages scattered public lands in the foothills of the central Sierra Nevada as well as within the Central Valley, including at the Cosumnes River Preserve. Some of these lands provide excellent recreational opportunities such as boating, swimming, hiking, fishing, and hunting. Hunting is a popular recreational activity on public lands managed by the BLM, though the BLM has had to restrict, and sometimes prohibit, hunting/firearms use in some of the most popular and scenic areas, such as BLM-administered land within the Preserve, to prevent conflicts among users and to protect sensitive environmental resources. The implementation of the 2013 Cosumnes River Preserve Hunting Program is in accordance with the superseding 10 year Cosumnes River Preserve Management Plan.

The Hunting Program has been designed to:

- Promote the safety and well-being of hunting participants, non-hunting visitors, staff, volunteers, and the Preserve's facilities, infrastructure, and properties;
- Promote compliance with applicable laws and regulations;
- Minimize or eliminate conflict with fish, wildlife, and plant population goals or objectives as outlined in the Preserve's March 2008 Final Management Plan;
- Minimize conflicts with other compatible wildlife-dependent recreation;
- Minimize conflicts with neighboring landowners;
- Promote accessibility and availability of hunting opportunities to a broad spectrum of the American public;
- Promote natural resources stewardship and conservation;
- Promote public understanding of the value of responsible hunting as a valid and scientifically based wildlife management tool;
- Provide reliable and reasonable opportunities to experience wildlife and;
- Use hunter participation and satisfaction to help evaluate and define changes to the hunting program.

The Cougar Unit was purchased by the BLM in 1990 and has been an actively hunted area during the waterfowl season since the wetland portion of the unit was restored in 1995.

The Silverado Unit was purchased by the BLM in 2001 and underwent native grassland restoration project in 2004; the proposed action would incorporate this unit as a newly hunted parcel to provide additional recreational opportunities as described in the Hunting Program.

Visual Resources:

As set forth in the Preserve Management Plan, the BLM manages the Cougar and Silverado Units in accordance with class II visual resource management (VRM) standards (as defined by the BLM visual resource management classification system established in 1992). The objective of class II is to retain the existing character of the landscape. The level of change to the characteristic landscape should be low. Management activities may be seen, but should not attract the attention of the casual observer. Any changes must repeat the basic elements of form, line, color, and texture found in the predominant natural features of the characteristic landscape.

Cultural Resources

The Cougar and Silverado units were inventoried for cultural resources in 2003, 2012, and 2014 for various projects by BLM archaeologists. Both units are considered intensively inventoried for cultural resources. Various cultural resources have been identified. These resources include a prehistoric site and historic-era earthen levees/roads including a water-control structure built into one of the levees.

4.0 Environmental Effects

As stated in Section 3.0, Affected Environment, the following critical elements have been considered in this environmental assessment and have been determined to be unaffected by the proposed action: prime/unique farmlands, wild and scenic rivers, wilderness, traffic, climate and change, and environmental justice.

4.1 Impacts of the Proposed Action and Alternatives

Areas of Critical Environmental Concern

The proposed action would not significantly impact floodplains, wetlands and riparian zones, and the relevant and important values for which the area was designated an ACEC.

Noise:

Sounds relating to hunting activities can be expected as a result of the proposed action. Negligible noise in the form of one to two shotgun shots, aimed low to the ground at turkeys, would be expected as a result of expanding recreational activities during the spring turkey hunting season. The expected noise would be limited to approximately 5-7 days during a typical 37+/- day spring turkey season extending from late March to early May annually. Due to the sites remote location, and occurrence during the legal hunting season, no significant impact would result from the proposed action. This area is also actively hunted during the fall/winter waterfowl season so the sounds associated with hunting are already present for short durations through the year within the proposed action area.

Vegetation:

The Cougar and Silverado Units experience light human activities throughout the year as a result management efforts and the waterfowl hunting program that takes place each year during the designated season. The proposed action would add limited activity to these units for only 5-7 days per year and for only a short time period on each hunt day. No special status plant species were found within the action area during botanical surveys and the Project Design Features in Section 2.2 place requirements on hunting parties regarding removal of all trash, shell casings, decoys, and other hunt related items at the end of each hunt day. As such, no significant impact on vegetation is expected as a result of this action.

Wildlife:

The Cougar and Silverado Units experience light human activities throughout the year as a result management efforts and the waterfowl hunting program that takes place each year during the designated season. Wildlife in this area are used to this level of activity and the proposed action would add limited activity to these units for only 5-7 days per year, and for only a short time period on each hunt day. Therefore, no significant impact is expected as a result of this action.

Migratory Birds:

Due to the short duration of the hunts and the limited dates that will be hunted during the turkey season, no significant impact to migratory birds per the MBTA would occur as a result of this action.

Special Status Species:

Valley elderberry longhorn beetle:

Suitable habitat for this species exists at proposed action site; however, no elderberry (*Sambucus*, spp.) was found on either unit during botanical surveys. As the species is typically found only in and around host plants, no adverse effects to this species would result from this action.

Tricolored blackbird:

Tricolor blackbirds historically occurred on the Preserve; a nesting colony existed until approximately 10 years ago, roughly 2 miles northwest of the proposed action area in the Preserve's "Barn Pond" wetland unit. Though the Preserve is currently managing nesting habitat for the tricolored blackbird roughly 3 miles northwest of the proposed action area in the Preserve's "Lost Slough" wetland unit, surveys conducted by Preserve biologists and Audubon-California biologists have not found any evidence of colonization by the birds to date.

The presence of suitable habitat and the proximity of the proposed action to these areas indicate that the tricolored could potentially be present, disperse, forage, and nest at or near the proposed action area. However, because the tricolored blackbird does not currently colonize on the Preserve, nor forage near the proposed action area, the action would not significantly affect the bird.

Swainson's hawk:

The Swainson's hawk is a known summer resident of the Preserve and the surrounding areas. The presence of suitable habitat in the proposed action to these areas indicates that the hawk could be present, disperse, forage, and nest at or near the proposed action area. However, there have been no documented nesting sites on these units and, though the Silverado Unit contains suitable foraging habitat, the infrequency and short duration of the scheduled hunts is expected to have no significant effects on foraging opportunities for this species.

Greater sandhill crane:

The greater sandhill crane is a winter resident of the Preserve, and has been known to utilize Cougar wetland as a roost location early in the season until the area becomes too deep with annual high water. Up to 150 cranes (mixed lesser and greater) have been observed using the roost site while the site is viable during the winter season.

As the greater sandhill crane is exclusively a winter/wet season migratory resident of the Preserve (including the proposed action area), and the proposed action would occur during the spring turkey hunting season, the proposed action would not significantly affect this species.

Giant garter snake:

In the 25-year history of the Preserve, there have been no documented sightings of giant garter snakes within the proposed action area. In fact, there have been no documented sightings, scientific or anecdotally, of giant garter snakes in the lower Preserve (*e.g.*, below Twin Cities Road). However, the presence of suitable habitat and the proximity of the proposed action area to a known sub-population of giant garter snakes indicate that giant garter snakes could disperse, forage, and breed at or near the proposed action area if suitable hibernaculum habitat was available (*i.e.*, upland habitat above flood inundation levels). Due to the Project Design Features in described in Section 2.2, the proposed action is not likely to significantly affect the giant garter snake.

Recreation:

The implementation of the Cosumnes River Preserve Hunting Program is in accordance with the superseding 10-year Cosumnes River Preserve Management Plan. Since its inception in 2008, the Hunting Program has helped the BLM achieve the goal of providing recreational opportunities to underrepresented members of the hunting public, as well as helping the BLM meet its multi-use mandate. The proposed action builds on the past successes of the hunting program, providing new recreational opportunities on BLM owned public lands. No other recreational activities, outside of those stipulated in the Hunting Program, take place within the action area at any time of the year. As such, the proposed action will not interfere with, or have cumulative effect on, other recreational activities available to the public at the Preserve

Visual Resources:

The proposed action would not impact visual resources. Light human activity is common on the Silverado Unit as part of management activities and the Cougar Unit is already an actively hunted parcel during the waterfowl season. The BLM manages the area in accordance with VRM class II standards, which is to retain the existing character of the landscape; the limited activity within the action area, resulting from the proposed action, would not interfere with the BLM meeting these standards.

Cultural Resources:

The proposed action has been reviewed to determine whether significant cultural resources would be affected, in accordance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. The area of potential effects is considered the Cougar and Silverado units. This area has been intensively inventoried by BLM archaeologists, as recently as 2012. Cultural resources have been identified including a prehistoric site and historic-era earth levees/roads including a water control structure known as the weir built into one of the earthen levees. The proposed action would not cause any surface disturbance. None of the resources identified within the APE would be affected by the proposed action.

4.2 Impacts of the No Action Alternative

The No Action alternative would result in no further hunting, outside of the previously approved hunts during the waterfowl season, on the Cougar and Silverado Units. Therefore, there would be no effects on any of the critical elements discussed in this EA. BLM operations would continue as normal on these Units in accordance with the existing Preserve Management Plan.

Recreation

Under the No Action alternative, the recreational opportunities at the Cougar Unit would remain the same. The BLM would continue to annually issue a Special Recreation Permit to a hunting organization to administer the Preserve's Waterfowl Hunting Program. The hunting public would be impacted by the reduction of potential hunt days and the BLM would be required to seek alternative methods for meeting its multi-use mandate.

Visual Resources

This alternative would not affect the current visual resources in the project area. The natural landscape and views along the roadways would remain the same.

4.3 Cumulative Impacts

NEPA regulations require that an Environmental Assessment discuss proposed action impacts that, when combined with the impacts from other actions, could result in cumulative effects (40 CFR 1508.25). Cumulative impacts may result from individually minor, but collectively significant, effects of several projects over a period of time.

There are no long-term site-specific adverse impacts expected from the proposed action for the ACEC. The addition of the turkey hunt at the Cougar and Silverado Units is the execution of a planned action as defined in the Hunting Program. The action area has been, and continues to be an actively hunted site during the waterfowl season; the proposed action extends hunting in the action area to include the turkey hunting season, but incorporates no new lands outside of those established in the 2013 Hunting Program. The cumulative effect of this action will be additional shots fired on these units, along with those that occur during the waterfowl hunting season. If, in future years, additional parcels, or additional seasons are added to already hunted parcels as designated in the Hunting Program, there may be a cumulative effect. However, as previously stated, the Hunting Program has been implemented in accordance with the superseding CRP Management Plan; as such, the potential impacts of this and future actions have been taken into account. The beneficial cumulative effect of this action is that more recreational opportunities are made available to women, apprentice, and mobility impaired hunters in the form of additional hunt days and seasons.

The additional potential benefit and cumulative effect of this program is a reduction of trespass poaching that may occur on within the Cougar and Silverado Units. By opening a turkey hunt on these parcels, illegal trespassers would be afforded less opportunities to poach turkeys in the presence of

legal hunters and check station operators that have immediate access to game wardens and federal law enforcement personnel

The recreational opportunities at the Preserve, aside from those described in the Hunting Program include bird watching, photography, hiking, paddling, and various other outdoor activities. However the Cougar and Silverado Units are separated from the other area of the Preserve that are accessible to the public; therefore no cumulative impacts to these activities are expected as a result of the proposed action.

5.0 Agencies and Persons Consulted

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife was consulted regarding this proposed action.

5.1 Authors

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5.2 BLM Interdisciplinary Team/Reviewers:

<i>/s/ James Barnes</i>	<i>2/25/04</i>
NEPA Coordinator/Archaeologist	Date
<i>/s/ Mariah Brumbaugh</i>	<i>2/24/14</i>
Preserve Wetlands Manager	Date
<i>/s/ Jeff Horn</i>	<i>2/25/14</i>
Outdoor Recreation Planner/VRM Specialists	Date
<i>/s/ Sara Sweet</i>	<i>2/24/14</i>
Botanist	Date
<i>/s/ Mark Ackerman</i>	<i>2/24/14</i>
Wildlife Biologist	Date

5.3 Availability of Document and Comment Procedures

This EA will be posted on Mother Lode Field Office's website (www.blm.gov/ca/motherlode) under NEPA and will be available for a 15-day public review period. The EA is also available by mail upon request during this 15-day public review period. Comments should be sent to James Barnes at Bureau of Land Management, Mother Lode Field Office, 5152 Hillsdale Circle, El Dorado, CA, 95762, or emailed to jjbarnes@blm.gov.

6.0. References

- Bureau of Land Management (BLM), 2008. Sierra Resource Management Plan and Record of Decision. February 2008. Available from:
http://www.blm.gov/ca/st/en/fo/folsom/rmp_index_page.html
- Bureau of Land Management (BLM), 2010. Special Status Animals in California, Including BLM Designated Sensitive Species. Available from:
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- Cosumnes River Preserve (CRP). 2013. Cosumnes River Preserve Website. Available from:
<http://www.cosumnes.org/>.
- Endangered Species Act of 1973 (16 U.S.C. 1531-1544, 87 Stat. 884), as amended -- Public Law 93-205, approved December 28, 1973, repealed the Endangered Species Conservation Act of December 5, 1969 (P.L. 91-135, 83 Stat. 275). The 1969 Act had amended the Endangered Species Preservation Act of October 15, 1966 (P.L. 89-669, 80 Stat. 926).
- Kleinschmidt. 2008. Cosumnes River Preserve Management Plan, Final. March 2008. Prepared for Cosumnes River Preserve. Available from: <http://www.cosumnes.org/about-the-preserve/>.
- McQuillen, H. 2008. Cosumnes River Preserve Hunting Program Plan. Prepared for the Cosumnes River Preserve by the Preserve Manager. Updated 2011, 2013.
- Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 (16 U.S.C. 703-712; Ch. 128; July 13, 1918; 40 Stat. 755) as amended by: Chapter 634; June 20, 1936; 49 Stat. 1556; P.L. 86-732; September 8, 1960; 74 Stat. 866; P.L. 90-578; October 17, 1968; 82 Stat. 1118; P.L. 91-135; December 5, 1969; 83 Stat. 282; P.L. 93-300; June 1, 1974; 88 Stat. 190; P.L. 95-616; November 8, 1978; 92 Stat. 3111; P.L. 99-645; November 10, 1986; 100 Stat. 3590 and P.L. 105-312; October 30, 1998; 112 Stat. 2956. Available from: <http://www.fws.gov/laws/lawsdigest/migtrea.html>

Cosumnes River Preserve Property Map

Figure 1. General Location of Proposed Action

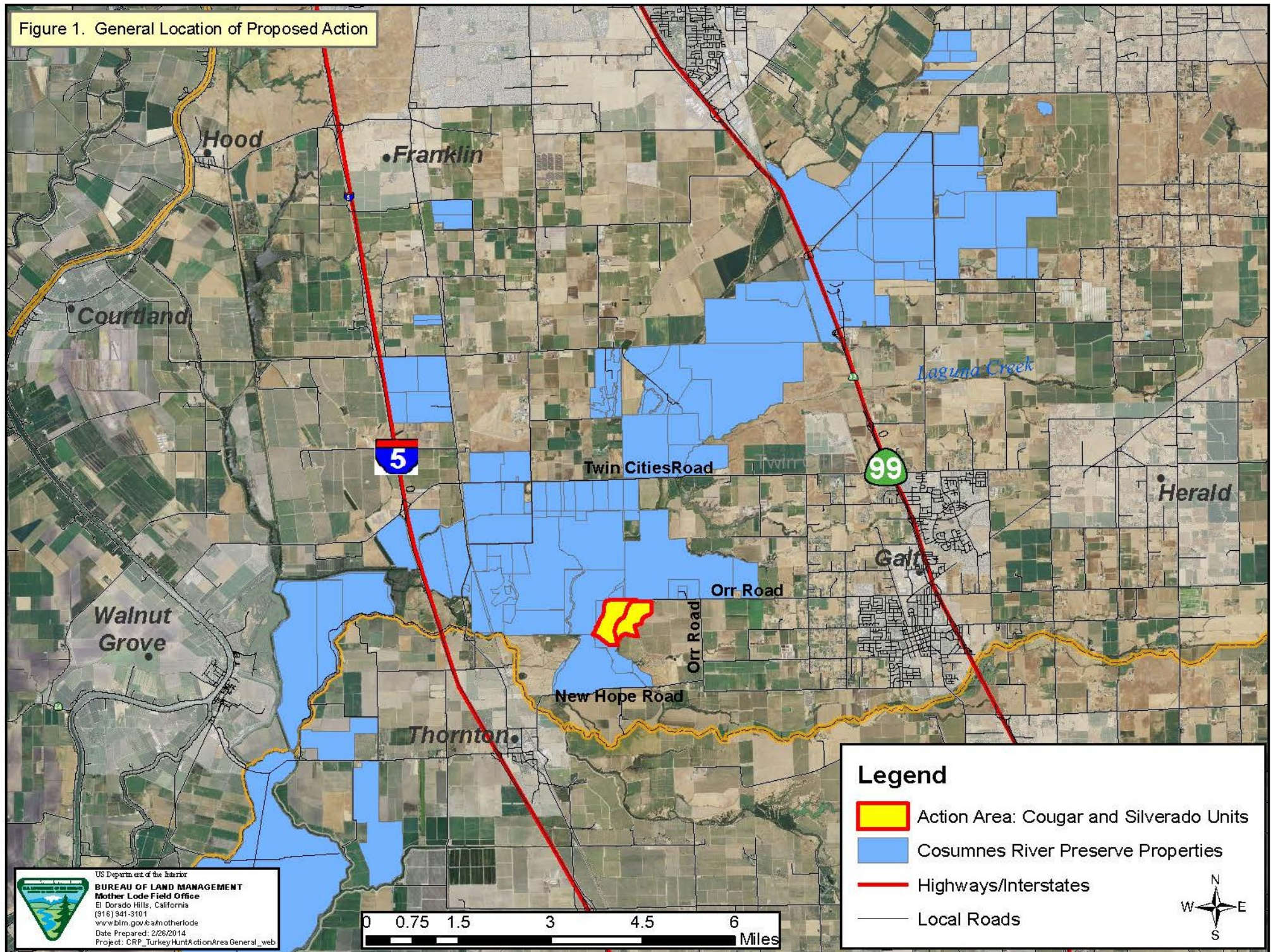


Figure 2. Proposed Action Area

